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All roads lead to Florentine patricians

Review of: Elisa Goudriaan, *Florentine Patricians and Their Networks: Structures Behind the Cultural Success and the Political Representation of the Medici Court (1600-1660)*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2018, 479 p., ISBN: 9789004346529, € 179,00.

Tessel Luitjens

The patronage of Florentine patricians in the first half of the seventeenth century has remained underexposed for a long time, as most art-historical attention focused on the patronage of the grand ducal Medici court. Over the past fifteen years, however, an increasing number of books and articles have shifted attention to the cultural activities and patronage of individual patrician families. Goudriaan strives to offer the first extensive overview of this patronage, combining findings of her own archival research with the research tradition of the University of Groningen (Patrician Patronage Project), which concentrates on the cultural activities of Florentine patricians, and the research tradition of Leiden University, centring on (cultural) networks in early modern Europe.

The first chapter provides us with a historical and political background of Florence between 1530 and 1670 and helps us understand how the social and political position of the patricians changed in the course of the seventeenth century. After that, Goudriaan shows how the patricians functioned as ambassadors and diplomats, and how they shared a cultural and political world with the Medici. Extensive correspondence makes it clear that the Medici entrusted patricians such as Giovanni Niccolini and Piero Guicciardini to function in a fairly independent manner at the Roman court, although it would have been interesting if Goudriaan had elaborated on the role of patrician's wives and their contacts with other diplomats. Goudriaan shows that there was a culture of mutual consultation, which means that the Medici and the patricians were interdependent. Moreover, the patricians did not only contribute to the Medici collection, but also collected for their own convenience. In this way, Goudriaan convincingly contradicts the long-standing paradigm of the supremacy of the Medici in seventeenth-century Florence.

The thematic approach additionally shows the breadth of the shared cultural world of Florentine patricians and the Medici family. In the last chapters, Goudriaan discusses the cultural academies, to which both the patricians and the Medici actively contributed and where they took part in discussions about literature, art, poetry, theology, and theatre. Furthermore, they worked together in organizing cultural and ceremonial events to honour distinguished guests of the Medici court. Together they created a varied cultural world where vernacular language was discussed, art was used as a diplomatic means and theatre and opera proved exemplary for the whole of Europe. Fascinating is also Goudriaan's fifth chapter about the brokerage activities of Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger, whose network she analyses in a clear and

intelligent manner, showing how his informal contacts with artists and patrons enriched the cultural world of seventeenth-century Florence and beyond.

The main concern of the book is to demonstrate the ways in which Florentine patricians as a group contributed to the cultural success and social representation of the Medici court in the period of 1600 to 1660. Goudriaan does not have one dominating research question or a clear theoretical framework, which means that her book has no tight structural approach. It is only in the last two chapters of the book that she introduces a theoretical framework of social-, patronage-, and brokerage networks, in order to discuss the activities of Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger. Moreover, there is no clear definition of terms such as 'cultural success' or 'ways' (in which patricians contributed) or even 'the Medici': who can be considered a 'Medici'? Only the Grand Dukes personally? Or also their siblings and other relatives? To what extent can for instance Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici (1617-1675) – whose collection recently was the subject of a large exhibition in the Pitti Palace – be seen as a (typical member of the) 'Medici'?

Goudriaan has organized her six chapters thematically rather than chronologically, as each chapter strives to show the different ways in which patricians as a group have contributed to the cultural climate of Florence. This approach ensures that the book gives a rich and varied picture of the patricians and their networks, but if Goudriaan had chosen to place and apply her theoretical framework earlier, it would have resulted in a book in which the patricians as a group would have been pictured more extensively and analytically. Moreover, had she posed a more precise research question about the specific ways in which the patricians as a group contributed to the Medici court, this would maybe have better supported her main concern. Especially in the second and third chapters she could have said more about the ways in which the patricians functioned as a group in the political world of diplomats and ambassadors and in the cultural world of patrons and collectors. Now, instead, the chapters list a number of individual patricians as examples of a larger whole, without defining what precisely that whole is. Hence one could for example wonder to what extent the diplomatic strategies of the two discussed Tuscan ambassadors in Rome, Giovanni Niccolini and Piero Guicciardini, consisting of food gifts and the acquisition of art, should be taken as representative for the larger group of patrician ambassadors.

All in all, this book offers the first comprehensive overview of the cultural world and diplomatic strategies of the Florentine patricians in the first half of the seventeenth century. Although at times lacking a structural framework, it convincingly shows the many ways in which these patricians have contributed to the cultural success and European ambitions of the Medici court between 1600-1660.

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